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ABSTRACT

This report was prepared by participants in the Pre-Conference Workshop for Foreign Language Consultants and Supervisors at the annual meeting of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages in November 1974. In part 1, exploratory language programs are described, and goals for such programs are listed in part 2. Part 3 describes five types of programs for the Middle and Junior High School. Part 4 contains a list of representative exploratory programs, and the recommendations of the workshop participants are given in part 5. The appendix to the report includes several descriptive examples of exploratory programs. (PMP)

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EXPLORATORY FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

A Curriculum Report Produced by Participants in the ACTFL Pre-Conference

Workshop for Foreign Language Consultants and Supervisors
November 27, 1974 -- Denver Hilton

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Percy Fearing and Frank Grittner, Editors

INTRODUCTION

During the 1960's much of the talk about foreign language programs below the high school level included the assumption that the middle grades would be devoted to the mastery of some portion of "Level I" or perhaps even "Level II." It was assumed at that time that the exploratory function would be taken care of by the so-called FLES programs. As we now know, the FLES movement soon faded in most districts where it had been introduced and many districts never did develop FLES programs of any kind. Therefore, the early 1970's witnessed a reappearance of various kinds of exploratory programs in the middle school years. No precise definition of "middle school" can be given because they emerged as a result of enrollment and pupil population shifts which demanded a different manner of building utilization. These factors varied greatly from district to district. Consequently, a "middle school" today could be a traditional junior high school with grades 7-9, or grades 5-8, grades 6-8, or just grades 7-8. Although some of the contemporary exploratory curricular development has taken place at the senior high school level, for the most part, exploration has been restricted to the middle school. Hence, it is to the middle level that the workshop committee directed its attention. For the most part, the committee members were foreign language supervisors with local or state responsibility. There were, however, a few teachers, college professors and department chairpersons in the workshop. Working committees of eight persons were established, and it was through the efforts of these working committees that the following material was generated.

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I. Definitions:

A. An exploratory language program is a linguistic and cultural experience which precedes or initiates a regular sequential language program.
B. An exploratory program affords students an opportunity to make a better decision about a course of study to which they will probably be devoting at least two academic years.
C. An exploratory program, in addition to improving student decision-making, provides for: 1) broader interest generated in languages, and the corollary of combating elitism; 2) introducing ideas of bicultural acceptance at a crucial period in student social development; 3) a chance to learn how to learn a language.

II. Suggested Goals:

A. Affective domain
   1. To provide as many students as possible with a satisfying introductory foreign language experience.
   2. To provide motivation for further language study
      a. To create a desire to elect a foreign language
      b. To increase the holding power once the student is in a sequential program, especially between levels 1 and 2
   3. To inspire an appreciation for other cultures

4. To increase or develop a self-awareness through an awareness of cultural differences
   a. Ethnic pride
   b. Self-image
   c. Contributions to American culture

B. Cognitive domain
   1. To give students some background information about languages and to provide a basis for selection -- or non-selection -- of a foreign language to be studied
   2. To provide an introduction to language
      a. What is language?
      b. How does one learn a language?
   3. To improve students' ability to use their first language correctly
   4. To develop a limited degree of skill in the languages presented

III. Types of Programs for the Middle School and Junior High School

A. The Beginning Sequence Approach. One fact which emerged from the Denver workshop was the revelation that many of the participants still felt that the junior high or middle school program should constitute all or part of Level I in a sequence which leads into the senior high school program. They maintain that the best way to explore a language is to begin the serious study of it and that to begin a language sequence does not obviate the exploratory value to be derived from such a beginning. Research by John Carroll reported in Foreign Language Annals, December, 1967, indicated that one of the two main factors influencing proficiency was, indeed, length of exposure to that language. This would tend to support the view of those who advocate the beginning sequence approach. Thus, at the outset, it would seem advisable to recommend that any school which has established a coordinated, unified and articulated program from the middle grades through high school should seriously consider staying with that approach rather than replacing it with some form of exploratory program. However, a number of schools have reported certain problems either with establishing or maintaining such a sequence. For various reasons relating to local conditions, schools have reported articulation problems between the middle grades and the senior high school, a resulting tendency of the junior high school to be excessively pedantic and college oriented, further tendency of such a program is to have high attrition rates and even to exclude students who did not have high academic ability. A number of participants were quite emphatic in stating that this need not happen and should not happen with the beginning sequence courses. Others were equally emphatic in stating that it did happen and was happening in many schools and that, therefore, alternative approaches were needed. What follows, then, is a description of various kinds of alternative programs which have been identified as "exploratory." Following the discussion, we have appended a listing of school districts in which programs fitting the various categories are not in operation.

   1. The Initial Basic Course Sequence - A minority Report
      Bristol Township School District
      Levitttown, PA 19057
      This district did away with exploratory programs in 1966 and prefers regular sequence.
      Reasons:
      a. Longer total sequence possible.
      b. Makes better use of the optimum language learning years in pupils' growth.

c. Gives a more realistic perception of foreign language study.
d. Doesn't waste the student's time. (Assumption: They are of insignificant value as a decision-making aid because students already have made up their minds.)
e. Captures early enthusiasm. (Assumption: Older students are harder to interest.)

2. Rebuttal
a. It is easier to find teachers for a six-week exploratory unit than for a sequence course that will enable students to pass successfully into upper level high school.
b. Regular sequence offerings increase difficulties of developing a coordinated curriculum as it involves two or more schools instead of a single department. Thus, an uncoordinated or poorly coordinated program can result in serious articulation problems and severe community disgruntlement.
c. Regular sequences too often eliminate or exclude too many students who, at a later time, might otherwise study a foreign language.
d. Middle school courses (regular sequence type) can suffer in districts from an overwhelming pressure to conform to a college-oriented high school program.

B. The Language Potpourri. French, German Latin and Spanish (or a combination including other languages) are all offered as a requirement for successive nine-week periods in a given school year. The advantage of such a program is that all students are exposed to all the languages which are offered at the senior high school level. Thus, students are given a broad basis for electing foreign languages (or for not electing them) when they reach the high school. Critics of this approach claim that students tend to be confused by what may only be a superficial exposure to so many languages. Other criticisms, some of which are contradictory, relate to the fear that students will elect the language in which the teacher presented the most "fun and games" activities or that students will tend to elect in the largest numbers, the last language which was offered during a given school year. The fear is also expressed that having to view so many languages in the short space of one year will lead to confusion in the mind of the student. Supporters of this type of program claim that it can be done successfully and that such problems will not appear in a properly designed program.

C. The General Language Course. This approach is unified around the theme "What is language all about?" Topics include such things as the history of language, the interrelationship of the various language families, the relationship of culture to the various languages, etc. The advantages of this approach are that broad conceptual learnings are possible and, through this conceptual framework, students can be exposed to the nature of many languages past and present. Perhaps the main problem with such a course is in finding a teacher who is properly qualified to teach about the history, etymology and cultural facets of a number of languages. Even where such a teacher can be found, there is also the danger that students will equate the study of language with that of philology, anthropology, etc., thereby failing to realize that a great deal of skill development is also involved in the proper learning of a second language. Proponents of the general language course insisted this need not happen. It can, in fact, be prevented by planning a series of skill development activities in one or more languages with which the teacher is familiar.

D. The Single Language Exploratory Offering. A single language is selected which may, or may not, be one of the languages offered in the high school program. Such a course might be offered in a six-week or nine-week block or on alternate days for an entire semester. The program is offered to all students. In some cases courses of this type have not been sequential with the high school program. That is, they may be offered in grade 5, 6 or 7 even though the high school course does not begin until grade 9. Participants in the Denver workshop, however, strongly advocated the offering of the exploratory program just prior to the beginning of the high school program. Administratively there are certain advantages to such a program in that staffing and scheduling problems are minimized and that the program is economical in terms of the purchase of texts and instructional materials. Problems cited with this approach are that students may be prejudiced in favor of the chosen exploratory language, thus causing an imbalance in the senior high school program in the future. Also, objections arise locally when students are required to study a specific language rather than having the choice from among several.

E. The Required Elective Approach. All languages which are offered in the high school are offered as "required electives" in the middle school. That is, each student must elect one of the languages offered for nine weeks, a semester, or an entire year. After the exploratory period he may continue with the language elected, he may discontinue language study entirely, or he may elect that language or a different language when he attends the senior high school. The advantages of this program are that a language learning experience is provided for all students in the school district; the student has a choice; there is no arbitrary requirement that he study a particular language; and there is the possibility of organizing highly significant exploratory experiences in each language which is taught by a specialist.

IV. Location of Representative Exploratory Programs

The following list is far from comprehensive. It was developed in the course of a one-day workshop by the 50 people who were in attendance. Despite the severe time limits imposed by the workshop format, the group did succeed in generating a list of programs and contact persons which represented most of the categories of exploratory programs discussed in the course of the workshop. In addition, many exploratory programs were identified which did not fit neatly into the various pre-conceived definitions of foreign language exploration. These are listed separately under the heading "Other Exploratory Programs."

Beginning Sequence Approach

Doris F. Berteau, Foreign Language Coordinator
Unified District 1
Racine, WI 53404
Grade 7, elective (97% enrolled)

Becky Stracener
Edison Public Schools
Edison, NJ 08817
Grades 7 and 8

Antonia E. Howington
"Junior Jet-Set"
Lilburn Middle School
Lilburn, GA 30247
Grades 6-7-8, elective

Virginia Gramer
Hinsdale Elementary Schools
Hinsdale, IL 60521
Begins in Grade 5, all students
Elective at grade 7 with entry point for new students
Elective at grade 9 with entry point for new students

Required Elective Approach

Sharon Johnson
Hubbard Intermediate School
Plainfield, NJ 07061
Grades 7 and 8, elective only

Virginia Gramer
Hinsdale Elementary Schools
Hinsdale, IL 60521
In several schools, 5th graders elect either French or Spanish, continue for 2 years in same language and then on entering 7th grade elect either language or none.

Dr. Nap DuFault, Principal
Westmont High School
Westmont, IL 60559
All freshmen required to explore one of the foreign languages offered by school district.

Ms. Phyllis Kloos, Foreign Language Consultant
Rochester Public School
c/o Mayo High School
Rochester, MN 55901

Language Pot-pourri

Jim Soran, Supervisor
Denver Public Schools
Denver, CO 80901
Grades 7-9, not required

Mrs. Barbara Chandler
De Kalb County
Decatur, GA 30033
8th grade, (other, depending on school situation) "Ports of Call" 12-week courses structured on travel theme.

Ms. Marjorie Davis
Mount Healthy Schools
2040 Adams Road
Cincinnati, OH 45231

Mrs. Ann Rose
Orchard Ridge Middle School
5602 Russett Road
Madison, WI 53711

General Language Course

Jane M. Bourque, Supervisor
Stratford, Connecticut Public Schools
Stratford, CT 06497
Grade 7, required

Single Language Exploratory Offering

Mrs. Barbara Chandler
De Kalb County
Decatur, GA 30033
Students of grades 11 and 12 elect a course which involves presenting units of study in foreign language to elementary students

Other Exploratory Programs

Dr. H. H. Johns, Jr.
Consultant, Foreign Language
Dallas Independent School District
3700 Ross Avenue
Dallas, TX 75204

M. Morency
Department of Education (Quebec)
1035 de la Chemotere
Quebec, Canada

Jose M. Infante
Foreign Language Consultant
Department of Public Instruction
Raleigh, NC 27611
Exploration of Bilingualism and English as a Second Language

Dr. Gail Hutchinson
Atlanta Public Schools
771 Lindbergh, N. E.
Atlanta, GA 30324
Correlation of exploratory language experiences with basic block curriculum

Mary Sanchez
Azalea Middle School
Box 4688 BPI
Clearwater, FL 33518
Pilot Middle School Program

Mr. Al Adams
The Colorado Springs School
21 Broadmoor Avenue
Colorado Springs, CO 80906
Interdisciplinary, core-centered program with continuous progress in basic skill areas
Grade 7 and 8, 42 students, 3 team teachers

Ms. Shirley Jane Kaub
East High School
Madison Public Schools
2222 East Washington Avenue
Madison, WI 53704

Lamar Middle School
Irving, TX 76060

Don Martinez
Coordinator for Foreign Languages
Pueblo Public Schools
Pueblo, CO 81000

Kershaw Districts
Greenville, SC
For information write to:
Dr. Beverly Enwall
State Foreign Language Consultant
Columbia, SC 29201

V. Recommendations and Words of Caution:

A. Some Do's and Dont's of exploratory programs as recommended by the Workshop participants.

Do's

1. Do staff program with highly qualified personnel; because of the newness of the program and the lack of established curricula, exploratory programs put unusual demands upon teaching staff.
2. Do make the exploratory program elective at the upper-junior high school levels.
3. Do make the exploratory course a no-credit, self-contained course which constitutes a worthwhile experience in itself.
4. Do set up small scale pilot programs for highly innovative programs before committing an entire school district to the exploratory concept.
5. Do provide an inservice program for the middle school teachers involved in the program.

6. Do familiarize senior high teachers with the nature, purpose and goals of the exploratory program.
7. Do involve parents and other community members in the program and do make the purpose of the course known to them.
8. Do encourage active, creative student behaviors in the exploratory program.
9. Do encourage cultural and interdisciplinary experiences in the exploratory program.
10. Do emphasize the use of the second language in a highly personalized and individualized way.
11. Do make the program a pleasurable experience.
12. Do offer a variety of language and cultural activities given within a humanities framework if such an organizational pattern exists in the local school.

Dont's

1. Don't exclude students on the basis of criteria such as low English grades, low I.Q., or lack of intention to follow the college preparatory track.
2. Don't overload students in the exploratory program with homework or busy work.
3. Don't leave the students at the end of the exploratory program with the impression that the exploratory program is nothing but fun and games.
4. Don't establish or start an exploratory program without first having established clear-cut goals and a clearly defined curriculum.
5. Don't neglect evaluation of the exploratory program (although evaluation need not be restricted to the formalized type of testing which is characteristic of the high school program).

B. Ideas for possible future development.

1. Emphasize listening and speaking skills in several languages on a year-long basis.
2. Provide extra-curricular language experiences as they are available in the local community.
3. Include cultural interdisciplinary approach involving social studies, music, and art.
4. Have the student build a fantasy society to see what makes up a culture and then discuss the resulting need for language.
5. Expose students to language by means of coordination with social studies and geography studies.
6. Begin with culture and show how various elements of various languages relate to that culture.
7. Have the students create a language as a cooperative venture.
8. Select foreign advertisements as a means of entering into both foreign language and the culture of one or more non-English speaking areas of the world.
9. Contrast the non-verbal use of communication with language as a means of communication.
10. Set up a team-teaching, year-long language course involving teachers from each of the languages offered in the school district.
11. Try a linguistic approach involving phonetics, comparative language structure and using visual aids for limited but meaningful communications acts.

12. Use a mini-course approach in which the students engage in such activities as trip planning and the subsequent need for various expressions for survival in the target culture.

Appendix: Some Descriptive Examples of Exploratory Programs

The Hinsdale Program

In the Hinsdale Program we begin French with all students enrolling in grade 5. Therefore, it fits into the format of the beginning sequence program. The result of this is that our students who begin in elementary and carry the sequence through junior high have demonstrated superior oral ability when compared with students at the same level who did not begin a foreign language study until high school. Hence, we can conclude that (with our program) increased skill in listening and speaking has been the result. Furthermore, we have not experienced some of the problems mentioned by others who have implemented programs of this type. In fact, we have a much lower attrition rate than schools which do not have a FLES program. More than 60 percent of our high school student body is enrolled in a foreign language. Our fourth and fifth level classes at the high school are full. Also, all in the district are exposed to foreign language with options for change at grades 7,9, 10, 11 and 12. Finally, we have very positive parent support. Several years ago a referendum for tax increase was passed, primarily because the threat of the elimination of our FLES program. "Greater love hath no man than that he pay more taxes for middle school foreign language study." (From a report by Virginia Gramer of the Hinsdale Public Schools)

The FLAIHM Exploratory Program

The FLAIHM refers to an interdisciplinary program which involves five foreign languages along with art, music and the student election involving a choice of industrial arts or home economics. The art, music and home economics teachers, besides teaching the basics of their subjects, focus on the learning activities and the over-all instruction on the art, music and foods of the different target cultures representing the languages being taught. Foreign languages included are Spanish, Greek, French, Russian or Latin.

Foreign Language Appreciation (FLA)

This is a program located in Baltimore County, Maryland. It is directed by John S. Harrison, Supervisor of Foreign Languages. The curriculum guides for this program are available throughout the ERIC system. The guides are entitled Meeting Another Language Through Culture: French and Meeting Another Language Through Culture: Spanish. Seventeen of the districts' 44 schools are involved in this exploratory program, grades six through twelve. According to the local consultant, "We are experiencing great growth in our exploratory program and expect many more schools to add it next year."

Esperanto in a Middle School - Exploratory Foreign Language Program

A different approach to a FLES program: The Esperanto option.
An exploratory course based on the international language Esperanto could be offered daily or on alternate days for a period of from six weeks to a year to all students.

1. Advantages

a) Scheduling problems would be minimized.

b) The program is economical in terms of purchasing texts and materials.
c) Owing to the regularized grammar of Esperanto, more of the language can be learned in a given period of time.
d) Program will not prejudice students for or against any particular foreign language offered in the high school.
e) Teachers would need to be proficient in only the one language.
f) Teachers would require less training in Esperanto than for another language.
g) Students could be exposed to many cultures (international correspondence is possible within a few weeks of study).
h) Substantial transfer from the study of Esperanto to the study of another language.
i) Owing to its regularity, all students, even those of low language aptitude, can achieve a measure of success.
j) Fits into purpose and framework of exploratory concept.

2. Disadvantages

a) Few teachers now trained in Esperanto and few places offering training in the United States.
b) Student has no real basis for choosing language study (among the other languages offered).
c) Resistance to non-continuous program by parents and administration.

Sources of information:

1. Information on contacts concerning programs in Hawaii, California, Oregon, Florida, Texas and elsewhere may be obtained from: Esperanto Information Center, P. O. Box 508, Burlingame, CA 94010, and the American Association of Teachers of Esperanto, Dr. John Lewine, President, West Stockbridge, MA.
2. The Hawaii Curriculum Project has a unit on communication which functions as a FLES program by introducing the students to language and communications through the study of Esperanto. This is used in all schools in Hawaii, though at the elementary level.

We are currently working on pilot projects to thoroughly document what has been informally tried in different schools. This is most advanced in the San Mateo County School District in California.

Summer training offered each year (for the past five years) at San Francisco State University; contact Dr. Richard Trapp, Associate Dean of Humanities, S.F.S.U., San Francisco, CA 94132.

(Duncan Charters, Principia College, Elsah, IL 62028)

Development of a Fantasy Society

First Year: Development of a Fantasy Society - interdisciplinary approach - building a culture with help in structure from teachers, including a language or means of communication within the culture, arriving at students' understanding of relationship between culture and language. It includes use of communication studies in art and music. (How a culture is depicted in the arts and other expressions of culture.) This deals with attitudes toward culture and language. Excellent personnel coordination between core and language teachers.

Second Year:

1. Students begin sequential language study

2. Oral program must be an integral part of curriculum
3. Emphasis on target culture in language
4. Must avoid stuffing student with facts; alternative: develop skills to allow students to inquire -- teacher not only resource
5. Emphasis on pronunciation and music of the language
6. Includes meaningful communication in language
7. Possibility of individual study according to students' interests in mini-course or readings
8. Culture capsules

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